

Turbulence-Part 1

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Summary: Slingshot suspects his fellow Autobots are hiding something from him.

Turbulence-Part 1

Superion pounded Ramjet against a wall. The Decepticon jet hovered there a moment, in shock, thrusters holding him aloft. They failed and he hit the pavement, groaning. Satisfaction echoed, all through Superion's component robots. But not for long.

"Autobot, suck my fumes!"

Superion swiveled towards the outburst. Skyquake, a Predator stealth fighter, was bearing down on him. The portion of Superion's mind that was Silverbolt cursed. The slow giant had neglected to watch his back. Piercing shots crackled from Skyquake's guns. All Superion could do was block them from hitting vital systems.

But in Slingshot, Superion's left arm, chaos was brewing. Slingshot's mind was closed to his brothers. The Aerialbot saw himself choking on darkness, enveloped and devoured. There was nothing, no sensation at all, until...The other parts of Superion's mind screamed at him, breaking his trance. Too late. Disoriented from his vision, Slingshot swept outward instead of inward, leaving Superion's chest exposed. The giant took Skyquake's blast in full and collapsed, the Aerialbots torn from each other.

"Incredible!" laughed Skyquake. "Size does not improve dexterity!"

Silverbolt pulled himself out of a dive and dizzily shot upward. "Dammit, Slingshot! What were you thinking?!" He was flanked by the other Aerialbots; Skydive, Fireflight and Air Raid.

Slingshot ignored them and propelled himself upwards, avoiding another shot from Skyquake.

"There's enough of us!" Skydive advised them. "Enough for a distraction!"

"Gotcha, Sky!" Air Raid hollered and sped towards Skyquake, kamikaze-style.

"Fool!" Skyquake screamed as he recklessly swerved away. Reckless enough that he left himself exposed. Slingshot spiraled towards the falling Decepticon and blasted off his right wing.

"Aiyaaahhh!!!" yelled Skyquake as hit the ground, transformed and burned. Quite a hangover he'd have the next day...

Slingshot, a Harrier Jump Jet, circled the smoldering Decepticon and cheered. "Another hit added to my ace tally, hah!"

Air Raid transformed into robot mode and landed, followed by his Aerialbot brothers. "What slag you're talking, Slingshot! I disoriented him. You just took a clear shot! And it's your fault we broke up Superion!"

Slingshot transformed and crossed his arms. "You're just upset you can't shoot straight, brother!" It was a challenge, most certainly not good-humored fun.

Malice formed in Air Raid's eyes. He stalked towards Slingshot. "I've always wanted to hit you..."

"Air Raid...", Fireflight pleaded.

"Back off, Air Raid," ordered Silverbolt, stepping in the fuming robot's way. "Slingshot did a good job and we're very happy he's here, remember?"

Air Raid's face when blank and then calm. "Yeah, correct," he weakly admitted. "Good teamwork, Slingshot." He turned and prodded at the ground.

Silverbolt admired the disabled enemies at his feet. "Our job is done. The natives of this world are safe, for now at least. Aerialbots, let's jet!"

As they transformed and soared off, Slingshot lagged behind to admire his victory. It was just what Ramjet wanted; a straggler from the pack. The Decepticon struggled to his feet and charged Slingshot. Caught unaware, the Autobot reeled. Ramjet tightened his fingers around Slingshot's neck, attempting to pop off his head.

"So, was it you who slammed me...erg...into that wall or...gah...was it Superion's other arm?" The Autobot just stared, wide-eyed. The blackness was taking him again! His eyes saw Ramjet morph into a swirling mass of hunger. "No matter..." Ramjet squeezed harder, but his strength was fading.

Slingshot came to his senses and brushed aside Ramjet. He dashed away and turned, regrouping himself. There was no sign of his brothers in the sky, and that was no surprise. Slingshot snickered. Whenever he got himself into a scrape, they rarely went through pains to assist him. They probably even hoped his luck would run out, one day. So far, it hadn't.

Ramjet was just standing there, grinning. Why? "Something funny, Jet?" Slingshot asked, raising his neutron rifle.

"As a matter of...gnnn...speak...ing..." Ramjet's vocal unit had been damaged and Slingshot was glad. He walked forth but was jumped by a smoking Skyquake.

"Nice shooting, Autoscum," Skyquake admitted as he punched Slingshot. Ramjet wandered over. The Aerialbot knew he could win, maybe. He struggled to throw off Skyquake but the `Con was hardly injured.

"Drat," Slingshot gurgled as he fought. Then, out of nowhere, Skyquake was propelled off him. Ramjet fell. As Slingshot stood, the other Aerialbots landed.

"Well," Silverbolt said, "I see you kicked them when down and they walloped you back. We thought you could use some extra guns!"

"Nah," Slingshot lied, getting to his feet. "I was just getting started." His brothers snickered. "But thanks, none the less..." This seemed to pacify them, but he doubted they took it as thanks.

"Stick with us in the future," Silverbolt ordered, "and be glad we looked back. Let's go."

As they took off once again, Fireflight hung close to Slingshot. "Glad you're okay, brother."

"Erm, thanks, Fireflight," Slingshot grimaced. Since when were they so damned nice?!

Silently, Silverbolt radioed his leader. "Optimus, mission accomplished. However, we had a distressing problem as Superior. It's Slingshot. Again..."

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>Slingshot sighed. The Aerialbots had just returned from a two-week mission and Optimus Prime already had another job for them!
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"..and proceed immediately to our supply depot on Stratagamis 9. Our forces there need aid in fending off the recent Decepticon attack runs. Any questions?"

Silverbolt gazed up at the esteemed leader of the Autobots. "How much resistance should we expect?"

"Not much, I imagine," Optimus answered. The tension level dropped. "Once our team gets there, it should be enough to scare off the small Decepticon force. Their troops are quite spread out these days."

"Okay, Aerialbots, let's head out!" Silverbolt led his men out the door, but Optimus leapt towards them. "Not you, Slingshot."

"Eh?"

"I need you for another mission. Bumblebee is recovering ship wreckage from an asteroid field. Your superb maneuverability as a Jump Jet would be an asset to his team."

"Ship wreckage? Bumblebee?!" Slingshot spun around. His brothers were gone. "But I'd be much more useful with them! Superion and all!"

Optimus waved a hand. "Nonsense. Their strength is more than enough. Now, proceed to Launchpad B. Bumblebee and Slag await you."

It was no use arguing, Slingshot realized. Optimus was adamant. He was destined for salvage! And with Slag the Dinobot, none the less! He trudged out of the room.

Optimus activated a com-unit. "Silverbolt, he's gone without incident. You may proceed according to plan. But the sooner you get back, the less questions there are..."

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>tik, tik, tik...

Slingshot tapped a pen along the base of his steel bench, creating a masterpiece. Unbeknownst to the other Aerialbots, he was quite a good artist. Slingshot fancied himself one, anyway. His line formed idealistic beauty, giving rigid life to a neural net pattern. Slingshot paused and smiled at the doodle. The greatest of Autobot scientists, Perceptor included, would applaud the design. To spite them, he swung his pen, largely adding the date and his signature. What flair!

"Gnnnn...." Slag said.

Slingshot glared at the slouched Dinobot. "What's your problem? Are you trying to get my attention?!"

"Dreams..." Slag mumbled, "Nightmares..."

Slingshot scoffed. "We don't dream. You know that. The occasional memory glitch in shutdown, but..."

"No," Slag barked. "Darkness. I see it, feel it."

"Oh, relax. Nothing important, prob..." He froze. He knew the sensation, felt it while part of Superion. Before he could speak, Bumblebee burst in the room

"Okay, guys. What do you say? We're in orbit around the wreckage. Get your gear and let's go." He darted back to the cockpit.

"Hmm..." Slingshot mused, watching the little pilot go. He faced his grumbling companion. "Slag, the odd thing is, I know the sensation you speak of. I've shared these visions. Doom, hopelessness?"

Slag nodded.

"Odd," Slingshot began. Then it struck him. "Odd man out."

"Huh?"

"We're the odd men out, Slag. Tell me, where are the other Dinobots? You rarely leave their side."

Slag snorted. "They complain to Optimus Prime, say my dreams distract me from fighting. So while they go to Stratagamis, I stuck here."

Slingshot twirled his pen. "So, in the midst of a battle with the Decepticons, they break up both the Aerialbot and Dinobot teams. How inane!"

"And all on basis of stupid dreams!" added Slag.

Slingshot hit his bench, frustrated. "But why send both of us on this useless mission? Doesn't it seem strange to you?"

"It's dumb!" said Slag. Slingshot would have sighed, but Bumblebee shot back in.

"Guys, your gear!" The two Autobots sneered at the pilot. Though Bumblebee was a nice chap, neither accepted him as superior. "Okay then, come on." Bumblebee winced and fled out the hatch.

Slingshot turned to Slag as he stood. "He's more nervous than usual. Care to guess why?"

"No," Slag said in all seriousness.

"Very well," sighed Slingshot. "I suppose you need more proof of conspiracy than I do." Slag shrugged. "Just watch what you say outside. He could pick up on our radio communication. Both grabbed tool kits and exited the ship, activating their gravity foot units. The shielded doorway, designed to keep in oxygen and preserve gravity, buzzed behind them.

They were parked on a large asteroid, about one-third the size of Earth's moon. Close by was a crashed shuttle.

"Now," Bumblebee briefed, "We cut our way in and take all the main computer components; whatever's useful."

"But Bumblebee," Slingshot complained, "Do we honestly need any more junk?! Wheeljack's lab is full of it!"

Bumblebee chuckled, a bit awkward. "Well, um, anything is helpful. Plus, the technology could be alien." He waved an arm at the shuttle and brandished a space torch. "Well, we have work to do..."

Slingshot's eyes met Slag's. The Aerialbot was relieved to see suspicion pass between them. They waited as the yellow Autobot walked away.

"Yes, Slag," Slingshot commented, "We have work to do. Investigative, in fact. Come on."

Bumblebee surveyed the shuttle, which seemed to be commercial. Alien letters were etched boldly down its sides and bright pictures were air-brushed near the ports. Slag snorted. The ship was bulky and round, probably like the clueless vacationers who used it.

"Looks like a business shuttle," commented Slingshot.

"Yes," Bumblebee said, "but hey, it's salvage. There might be some needed parts. We have a shortage, these days." Bumblebee saw the door was already open and looked inside. "Ah, what awaits?"

Slingshot sneered at his enthusiasm. The skeptic pair followed him in. While the insides were plush, Slingshot had a weird feeling...

"No bodies," Bumblebee said. "That's good. They must have been rescued, hence the open door."

"Why they no salvage ship?" Slag asked. Slingshot was proud of him.

Bumblebee scratched his head. "It's not safe to come into an asteroid field for anything apart from a rescue mission."

"But we do," Slingshot said.

Bumblebee patted his allegiance symbol and added weakly, "Well, heck, we're Autobots!" Slag crossed his arms, as did Slingshot. "Okay, maybe it's not all worth it. Sky Lynx saw this ship from afar, in passing, and thought it might be worth checking out. So, here we are. Let's do what we came for." With that, he entered the cockpit.

Slingshot looked around, a chill going through him. "There's something about this place. I know I've seen it."

"You take vacation?" Slag asked.

"No," Slingshot chided. "There's just some quality...on the edge of my senses..." He strolled around, taking in every corner, every shadow cast by their lights. Then, he eyed something, something that grasped him. It was a plush seat, folded against the wall. Slingshot rushed over and pulled it down; began ripping at the woolly covering.

Slag raised a brow. "What you doing?"

"Primus," Slingshot whispered. "I just don't believe it." He parted his hands, so Slag could see the bare metal surface of the bench. Drawn on the surface was a patterned drawing, with a familiar name etched across it.

Slag shrugged.

"Don't you see?" Slingshot gasped. "It's one of my drawings, here on an alien ship. But this, this isn't an alien ship. Just look around! The walls have been padded, the exterior refitted but this is an Autobot shuttle!"

Slag realized he was right. "Well, maybe they sell old shuttle to alien business."

Slingshot considered it and returned to his drawing. "No, the date I've signed is from only weeks ago, right before my team went on our mission. It couldn't have been sold, refitted, used and crashed in that time!" The shadows in the craft became much darker.

"So, the Autobots altered ship themselves?"

"Yes," Slingshot said, coldly, "and I'll bet they crashed it here too. Why do that, except to lure us away?"

"Slag not like this one bit!"

"Oh, me neither. They're keeping us away from our brothers on Stratagamis and I want to know why."

"So, what we do?" Slag asked.

Slingshot pushed him back as far as they could get from Bumblebee's range. They glared at the cockpit. "We take our ship," Slingshot whispered, "and head for Stratagamis. The answers must lie there. First, we have to trap and secure Bumblebee."

"Why not leave him here?" Slag asked.

"No!" Slingshot hissed. "We can't do that! We'll lure him back to the shuttle, so we can actually fight in the gravity field there and toss him in the brig."

"Plan?"

"Yes. Follow me..." Slingshot darted out the hatch, Slag behind him.

Meanwhile, Bumblebee was fiddling with the main control console. What an oversight! He had to scrape off the serial number before the others found it. His communicator buzzed.

"_Bumblebee, you there?_"

Bumblebee sighed in annoyance. "Slingshot, is that you? Where are you?"

"_We're back at the shuttle. Slag was injured; fell between the crashed ship's main thrusters and twisted his leg badly. I've helped him back to the ship but we could use your assistance repairing him._"

"What were you doing up there?! Oh, nevermind. I'll be right there!" Blasted imbeciles; couldn't even accomplish basic first aid! Bumblebee ripped off the serial number plate and tossed it aside as he left the craft.

Bumblebee trudged in his ship to find Slag and Slingshot, waiting impatiently by the door. "What..? He's standing just fine! You didn't need my help!"

Slag transformed to triceratops mode and charged Bumblebee. "Weak Autobot fall!"

"Slag!" protested Slingshot, hoping for less violent means.

Bumblebee fell but jolted forward, kicking Slag in the side. The Dinobot fell over. "A few surprises for a weak Autobot, yes?!" Bumblebee stood. "I don't know what's gotten into you, Slag! Slingshot, help me take him to a cell, till we can get back and have his circuits checked."

"No."

Bumblebee turned, to see the nozzle of Slingshot's neutron rifle. He snorted. "This is mutiny! What's wrong with you two?!"

Slingshot circled him. "Is that rhetorical?"

"Wha...?"

"Stop it! We're not fools! Why are we on this journey? Why was that ship accident faked?!"

Bumblebee shrugged, but suddenly felt the ominous presence of Slag behind him. The little robot's face contorted, his teeth gritted. To Slingshot, who only knew him as the Autobot's smiley kid-brother, it was unnerving.

"You're both crazy! This is treason!"

Slingshot smacked a fist on the wall. "Slag, put him in the brig. He won't talk. We'll only know the answers once we arrive at Stratagamis." The Dinobot, enthused by their new mission, grabbed Bumblebee. He wrestled Slag, gaining enough leverage to grab a wall.

"Slingshot, listen!"

The Aerialbot ordered Slag to halt. "Yes, Bumblebee?"

"Some knowledge we must live without. Do not go! Free me, proceed with our mission and I will forget this incident occurred!"

Slingshot shook his head. "No, no. It's much worse than we thought, isn't it?" Bumblebee didn't answer.

Slag turned to Slingshot. "We still go." It was a statement, not a question.

"But of course," Slingshot mused. "I'm used to comrades talking behind my back. Many don't like me. I don't understand it, but that's life. Never, though, have I seen such attention and care taken towards my deception! It makes me feel important. And you know what?"

Slingshot kneeled in front of Bumblebee. "I need to know why."

Bumblebee sighed. "You'll regret it."

His tone sent a shiver through Slingshot. "Maybe I will. Slag, let's get on with it."

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